

THE IMPROPRIETY
OF
RELIGIOUS CHARACTERS
KEEPING
BEER-HOUSES.

A LECTURE,
DELIVERED IN THE
INDEPENDENT CHAPEL, DRONFIELD,
ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11th, 1852,

And, by request, repeated in the Grammar School, on Thurs-
day, the 25th of November,

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

Sheffield :

PRINTED BY J. BLURTON, CASTLE STREET.



LECTURE.

It may appear strange to some minds, that in this year of our Lord, a Lecture on such a subject should be deemed necessary, but when they are informed, that here a Beerhouse has been opened under such circumstances; that another is really contemplated, and only waiting for suitable accommodation to be opened; that rumour, with her thousand tongues, has been busy informing of other professors that are tempted by the gain which the sale of beer offers, it is thought that they will agree in the opinion, that such a Lecture was absolutely demanded in this locality. Were no notice to be taken of events like these, it is feared that the evil would spread, that many others would follow the example, and buoy themselves up with the hope that there would not be so much wrong in it after all, seeing that the Ministers of the Gospel were silent on the subject. The Christian Minister sustains much of the same relation to the people amongst whom he dwells, as did the prophet Ezekiel to the Jews. "So thou, O Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me: when I say unto the wicked man, O, wicked man thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou has delivered thy soul." Here, then, is the Minister's authority for lifting up his voice against an alarming evil; that it is such an evil, he will endeavour to shew—the voice of warning he must lift up, for woe! woe! will be to him, if he allow any craven-hearted fears of giving offence to the workers of iniquity, to deter him from his duty to God, to the Church, and to the souls of men. He must speak the truth, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. He will try to "speak the truth in love," and thus deliver his own soul.

Such is the state of society in our country at present, that Public-houses or Inns are necessary, they are so, as houses of convenience in large towns and villages where business has to be transacted, and on the highways where rest and refreshment for man and for beast are every day, and almost every hour, needed. I can conceive how houses of this description may be respectably, and even religiously conducted—two or three I have seen, where, on ordinary occasions, I could, with as much freedom and quiet, engage in prayer, on paying a pastoral visit, as I could in any of our private dwellings; but, alas! alas! too many of our public-houses are of little or no use in providing accommodation for travellers—they are only drinking houses—these kind of Inns are very little, if any, better than Beerhouses. At such places raffles are frequently announced, cards and billiards, skittles and quoits, are generally provided,

that drink may be played for, and intoxication encouraged. I am just old enough to remember the law being passed which gave leave to open houses of an inferior character for the sale of beer and porter; and well do I recollect the change for the worse which took place in the village where I then resided, after the opening of two or three of these Beerhouses. They vie with the lowest class of Public-houses in providing enticements such as have been just named for the purpose of tempting the young, the thoughtless, and the dissipated, to become frequenters of their houses, and to drink deeply of their intoxicating bowls.

For professors of godliness to open their houses as Beerhouses is neither fit nor right; but absolutely wrong. In support of this statement I will now endeavour, with meekness, to assign some reasons. "I speak as unto reasonable men, judge ye what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things."

I. Such a course of action is wrong, because it is opposed to the general direction of Scripture, and to inferences fairly deduced therefrom.

All godly characters receive the Scriptures as the word of God, and acknowledge them to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect; thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Hear what the Scriptures say: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." "Depart from evil, and do good." "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart, I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee, I have refrained my feet from every evil way, I hate every false way." "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not; if they say come with us, walk thou not in the way with them, refrain thy foot from their path; for their feet run to evil." "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away." "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil." "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Abhor that which is evil." "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,

nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." "Abstain from all appearance of evil." "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." "Pure religion, and undefiled before God, and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." "Keep yourselves in the love of God, hating even the garment spotted with the flesh."

Such are a few, out of the many other passages, which might with propriety have been quoted, but these are sufficient to shew what is the general tenor of the Bible. Were but one of these texts to be prayerfully and believingly considered, its influence would be sufficient to prevent any Christian from opening his house as a common Beerhouse. True it is, there have been persons who, while professing to be on the side of godliness, have acted contrary to the spirit and letter of God's word; but in all recorded instances, in all that we or *our* fathers can remember, the Divine Being has always, in one way or other, manifested his displeasure, and severely chastised them for their disobedience. Aaron and the Israelites disobeyed at the foot of Mount Sinai, but they were justly rebuked and punished. Eli disobeyed the word of the Lord, with regard to his family, but his sons were slain in war, and he, himself, on hearing that the ark was taken, fell from his chair, broke his neck, and died. David disobeyed in the matter of Uriah the Hittite, but God permitted domestic broils to punish him, and embitter the remainder of his days. The man of God, the prophet, disobeyed in returning the same way back, but a lion met him and slew him. Jonah disobeyed, but the storm arose, and the three nights and days of confinement in the belly of the fish made him bitterly regret his disobedience, and implore pardon for his sin. God has the same regard for his Word now, as ever, and the same providence which overruled and punished these characters still presides at the helm of affairs, and will infallibly bring about the same results. When a man gets out of the path of duty, and enters upon a course of conduct that can neither be justified by conscience nor the word of God, he may be compared to a limb that is out of joint, every movement causes uneasiness and pain—to a ship without pilot, chart, or compass; every hour in danger of running on some quicksand, striking against some rock, and involving all concerned in total, irremediable ruin. The word of God is a "lamp unto our feet; a light unto our path," and when our

feet are guided by it into paths of righteousness, then we have peace in our minds, comfort in the reflection on our conduct, and hope—bright and smiling hope—cheering our prospect for the future and immortality: but when we turn away from that lamp, we may for a time get on without much inconvenience and trouble, but all experience unites with the word of God to declare, “the way of the wicked is as darkness, they know not at what they stumble.”

II. Such a course of action is wrong, because it involves a continual violation of the Lord's day.

When God created this world, we are told that “he rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made, and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.” When God gave the commandments from Mount Sinai, the fourth was, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates.” When God rained manna for the children of Israel as they passed through the wilderness, they were always to gather double quantity on the evening preceding the Sabbath, and though it would not keep on other days—yet on the Sabbath it was always sweet and good. Under the ceremonial law, to violate the sanctity of the Sabbath was a crime to be punished with the death of the offender. The prophets pronounced curses on the heads of those who profaned the Sabbath, and blessings on those who regarded it. When our Lord rose from the dead, the first day of the week, by Apostolic and Divine sanction, began to be called the Lord's day—and was regarded by the first Christians as sacred for the purposes of religion, as the seventh was by the Jews. The fourth commandment which enjoins the keeping of one day holy has never been repealed, and those who aim to please God will be as anxious to keep the fourth as they will be to keep the first or the sixth commandment. From a diligent perusal of the ministrations of our Lord we may come, as others have done before us, to the conclusion, that there are two kinds of works allowable on the Lord's day, works of necessity—and works of mercy. The keeping of a Beerhouse, which involves the violation of the Lord's day, is not a work of necessity. It is not necessary to those who keep them—all good men, in a general way, can, in this country, obtain all that is necessary for themselves and their families, by honorable industry. Christians know who it was that said, “Having food and raiment be ye therewith content.” It is not necessary for others that Christians should keep a Beerhouse. Those who, in peculiar circumstances, feel themselves compelled to travel on the Lord's day, seldom, or ever, call at the Beerhouse for refreshment—the company found there, on that sacred day, is

generally composed of the lowest, and most dissipated that the neighbourhood can furnish. Was there here, any necessity for the opening of another of these houses? Let the six Public-houses, and the four Beer-houses that were previously licensed answer this question. Let the moral and religious part of the community answer!

It would almost be an insult to your understandings—and I should have to suppose you ignorant of facts which are continually taking place, were I to attempt to prove that the keeping of a Beerhouse is not an act of mercy. Surely the keepers of these places could have no rest on their beds, no comfort whatever of the money that is thus obtained, if they were to reflect on the disastrous effects which are produced at the homes of the persons frequenting them: they have no need, now, to be told that the money gained by the sale of intoxicating drink, is so much taken from the comforts, yea, from the necessities of subsistence of the families of the drunkards. Let the wretchedness visible in every drunkard's home, let the haggard, tattered appearance of the children of drunkards—let the anguish, the wants, the prayers, the curses of drunkards' wives reply, as to whether there is any mercy in selling them the intoxicating drink on any day. If, then, neither necessity nor mercy can be pleaded for the keeping of a Beerhouse, it must be allowed that to keep one is to act in direct opposition to the fourth commandment; and to the most liberal and charitable construction which our Lord put on it in his expositions during his earthly sojourn, and, therefore, very sinful, and to be avoided by all the followers of Christ.

True it is, I may be told that the Law of England permits those who keep Beerhouses to sell their beer, and allow company to occupy their rooms for several hours on the Lord's day—this is admitted; but can English law take away the guiltiness of the act in the sight of God, or give any satisfaction for the violation of the Divine law? If the keepers of other shops were to open their places for business on the Lord's day, the magistrate would soon compel them to desist, or fine them for their conduct if summoned to his tribunal. Is it not strange then, that the retailer of ale should be allowed to follow his calling from noon till night on this day? Would that our laws were consistent with themselves, either compel all to close, or else allow all that like to sell; then in the latter alternative we should have a fine test of character, we should be able to distinguish between the good and the bad, between "him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." The godly man puts God's law in its right place, yields to that his first and heartiest obedience—he will suffer, suffer loss in his business, suffer loss of wealth, suffer loss of his life, rather than knowingly, deliberately sin against his conscience and his God. Do human laws come between him and his duty to God, he will say, "I must obey God rather than man." The Lord's

day loses all that peculiar character which God stamped upon it, and fails to accomplish the end for which it was designed when a considerable part of it is converted into a day of traffic and worldly gain. The godly man loves, on the evening of the Saturday, to compose his mind by reflection, reading, and prayer, for the high and holy duties of the Lord's day. In what suitable frame, for the worship of God, can the minds of those persons be, when, till the midnight hour, they have been distracted and vexed with the filthy conversation, and degraded habits of the frequenters of the Beershop? The Bereans went home from the public worship of God to search the Scriptures. and see whether those things were so or not; but how can the keepers of Beerhouses do this, when their domestic sanctuaries are continually violated by the intrusion of the thoughtless and the dissipated, who demand their services to supply them with the intoxicating drink? One of two things is morally, absolutely certain, either their religion will compel them to give up their Beerhouses, or their Beerhouses will compel them to give up their religion!

III. Such a course of action is wrong, because it is highly injurious to the best interests of Society.

Those statesmen and religious philanthropists that have watched the progress of these Beerhouses in the towns and villages of our beloved country, do not fail, ever and anon to point to them as a great and growing evil, and to lift up their warning voice respecting them. Wherever one is opened it soon becomes a rendezvous for the idle, the worthless, and the vile; a centre to which dissipated and wicked characters gravitate; a den of darkness, where deeds of iniquity are planned, where the heart is emboldened, and the hand strengthened in the execution of its wicked purpose by participating of the maddening, intoxicating cup. All living immediately around the Beerhouse are made uneasy, frequently are their slumbers disturbed, and themselves thrown into bodily fear by the drunken rows, the dreadful fights, and the awful profanity which are made to abound as the necessary consequence of houses of this character being opened. When a wicked man converts his house into a Beerhouse it is bad enough, and every lover of humanity is grieved at the circumstance; but when men professing godliness act in this manner, turn their houses—the places where prayer and praise used to be heard—where characters aspiring after godliness used to congregate—turn their houses to purposes so contrary, so degrading to themselves, and so injurious to all around—it is like thrusting away every thing that is good, and opening the arms to embrace everything that is bad; when such acts as these are perpetrated God is dishonoured, the Saviour is wounded afresh in the house of his friends, religion is seriously injured, the mouths of blasphemers are opened afresh, and the god of this world triumphs on every hand. In proportion to the previous estimate

of excellence which the public had formed of the characters so acting will be the amount of injury done to society. When men, who have long borne an excellent name for uprightness, and consistency of character, who have gained to themselves a good repute by their distinguished usefulness in all the agencies employed by the church of God to promote the temporal, spiritual, and eternal benefit of their fellow creatures, convert their houses into Beerhouses, they throw away, as worthless, all the advantages which they have acquired, and become instrumental in promoting immorality, irreligion and vice—they excite a perfect surprise in the minds of all to whom they are known, and fill the hearts of their fellow Christians with shame, grief, and sorrow.

What painful reflections arise in the mind of every thoughtful, serious man, as he sees the names which used to be synonymous with all that was good, associated with a licensed Beerhouse! Who can tell what is in man? O, my God, give me not up, in the hour of trial, to the tempter's power, lest I, too, should fall! "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "Guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

When a standard-bearer falls, discouragement fills the hearts of the surrounding soldiers, and emboldens the advancing foe. What heavy blows and sore discouragements are events like these to all pious, humble, praying souls—to all the noble army of Sunday school teachers, and to all who are longing for the temporal and spiritual welfare of the working classes. True, they fall with the heaviest weight on the particular community to which, as religious characters, they belonged; but then we are all but several parts of one great body, the church, and, if one suffer, we have all to bear our part in the affliction, and, therefore, we are all affected by them. Other, and much stronger, temptations are now added to what previously existed, for the young and rising generation to form bad habits, to get acquainted with evil characters, and to break through the recommendations of teachers, the commands of parents, and to travel the dangerous paths of drunkenness and vice. Events like these add feathers to the shaft, steel to the point of the arrow of temptation, make it fly the faster, and penetrate the deeper into the youthful mind. Who can calculate how much the influence of our churches, chapels, and schools, will be counteracted, and rendered inefficient by the association of these Beerhouses? Who can deny that a dreadful impulse has now been given to the profane to be louder and more awful in his profanity—to the drunkard to be still more vile—to the jeering unbeliever to be still more constant in his ridicule of religion and religious characters?

IV. Such a course of action is wrong, because it frequently

entails the most disastrous consequences on the families thus acting.

I am aware that the most plausible argument ever adduced in support of Beerhouses is, that it is profitable as an occupation, and an easy way of saving some ten or twenty shillings extra every week. Oh! say they—"Are we not to do the best we can for our families?" We reply, Yes, but we deny that keeping Beerhouses is doing the best you can for your families. We sometimes sing "Home, sweet home! there's no place like home." But when men turn their homes into Beerhouses there's not much sweetness there; the peace, the quiet, the comforts of home all fly away. Occasions are frequently returning when these houses present anything but the appearance of an English, moral, or Christian home, when every room is filled with strangers, or worse than strangers—the dissipated and the wicked—here you have the vain and frothy song—there you have the drunkard's fight—and above you have the youthful giddy dance. Where can religious minds find peace or rest amid scenes like these? Frequently must they in the secrecy of their minds long for the quiet, the comfort, the sweetness of their former home. It is not only detrimental to their own peace, but injurious to the moral and spiritual welfare of their children. The children frequently obtain a liking for the drink that is sold, and that takes away from the profit—the children frequently hear the ribald song, the profane oath, the impure conversation of the drunkard and the wicked, and become so familiarised with them as to be insensible to their sinfulness. Such children are in danger of becoming idle, wicked, and worthless as the worst of those that frequent the house: by their intemperate habits bringing on premature affliction and death—or becoming the pests of society—inmates of prisons—convicts exiled from our shores. Are we not to do the best we can for our families? Yes: but keeping Beerhouses is not doing the best you can for your families! The Beerhouse is frequently the place where there are drunken rows, the master of the house is called in to quell the riot, and separate the disputants. Is it an uncommon thing for him, in the midst of the strife, to receive the blows, and to be disabled for a time so that he cannot attend to his regular business? Does he not sometimes lose more in this way than the profits of beerselling for a week will supply? Have there not, in the neighbouring town, been cases of manslaughter, or worse, in Beerhouses? Is this doing the best you can for your families? Each member of the family has a soul as well as a body—to live in eternity as well as in time. The Bible tells us of a heaven, where purity, bliss, and love are found and eternally dwell, of a hell where all the workers of iniquity must dwell. Time will soon be past with us. Eternity will be quickly ours. Then, if in consequence of the neglect of better things, you miss heaven, what will it avail you, or your families, though you had gained all the world by selling drink, if you have lost your own souls?

Friends, I tremble, as I contemplate the dangers, temporal and spiritual, that surround, as an almost impassable barrier, the families living in the polluted, deadly atmosphere of the Taverns or Beerhouses. Doing the best you can for your families! Why, if the bible is true, and you profess to believe it, you are doing the very worst you can for your families? Doing the best you can for your families! Why, if religion be a good thing, and you have acknowledged it to be such, you are doing the worst you can for your families! Doing the best you can for you families? Why, if there be a heaven, if there be a hell, and your consciences tell you there are, you are doing the very worst you can for your families. Give up the plea of your families, and out with the truth. 'Tis the love of money, that grasping covetous spirit which has taken possession of your souls, and to satisfy it you are making shipwreck of faith, of good consciences, and of honorable lives of usefulness!

If my advice and counsel would be taken, I would cheerfully give it. An awful wrong has been done, a grievous sin has been committed; if the evil cannot be undone, it can be staid—give it up—leave such a course of action, 'tis a dishonourable calling for any—'tis a shameful, scandalous, wicked calling for a professing Christian to follow.

Professing Christians to you I appeal. Think you that enough has been said to shew that the keeping of a Beerhouse is incompatible with the profession of Christianity? If the reasons assigned are weighty, let them have their intended and legitimate influence on your minds. If it is wrong for professors of godliness to keep Beerhouses, it is wrong for professors to form the habit of visiting them. Suspect your religion, if, without pangs of conscience, you can go, waste your time, and spend your money in houses of this character. Have you business there? go and do it, and on its completion instantly leave. Let them never have your sanction for this. Need I tell you that cards and billiards, that raffles, skittles and quoits, are to be avoided by you, these are the baits set to entrap you, to lead you to drink, to disgrace, and ruin. "Come out from among them, and be ye separte, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Working men of Dronfield! I appeal unto you. You can settle the matter in the most effectual way. You, by abstaining from intoxicating liquors, can easily put a stop to the increase of houses of this character. I have been told, whether true or not I cannot tell, that each of these houses, one week with another, clears twenty shillings in profit. If so, the brewers who supply them with drink, will not be far behind in their profits, great as is their sympathy for the retailers of ale, they have a still greater sympathy for themselves. Were we to allow ten

shillings as the clear profits of each Beerhouse per week, and a similar sum for the profits of the brewers, which I doubt not is below the mark, then the sum of £260 will be annually cleared through the instrumentality of these five Beerhouses alone. All this is out of your hard-earned wages. I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without bearing my testimony to the working people of Dronfield; as a diligent, hard-working people, and in many respects worthy of commendation and praise. Allow me to ask you, brethren and neighbours, would it not be better for you, instead of enriching the brewers, and wasting your time at Beerhouses, to apply the money thus foolishly spent, for the promotion of your domestic comforts, and respectability; to give your time to the cultivation of cottage gardens, to the improvement of your minds? Here is a Mechanics' Institution, for eighteen pence per quarter, not quite three half-pence per week, you can have excellent accommodation for your winter evenings; access to the best of newspapers, to a good supply of magazines, to a library, containing many good books, and we will gladly welcome you as fellow-travellers in the march of progress and intellectual improvement. We have a Temperance Society here, also; your assistance and co-operation would be beneficial to ourselves, and very much for the advantage of society around. We have our Church and our Chapels, where the Ministers of the Gospel would be glad to see you, and use their utmost energies to lead you into the paths of morality and religion—lead you to the Cross of Christ—lead you to Heaven. Working men! we put in a claim for your consideration and co-operation. We want help in the work in which we are engaged. None can help us so much as you. Our mission is to wage war against ignorance, immorality, and sin. We are willing to unite with all that will unite with us in this great work—to lead one another on in the practice of temperance, morality, and religion. Will ye “come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” Come with us, and we will do you good; good for time, and good for eternity.

“Come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

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